THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS

25 SEP 1966

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An Impeachable Source Who Can Be Identified

American Foreign Policy
by Henry A. Kissinger.
Norton, 144 pp., $3.95

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No member of the Administration seems to outrank Dr. Henry Kissinger in the esteem of Richard Nixon. The President wholeheartedly shares the common view that the choice of the former Harvard professor as the chief White House Adviser on National Security Affairs is his most inspired appointment. Contrary to general supposition though, the President's gratitude is probably not so much for Kissinger's ideas on policy formulations, as for his unexpected virtuosity in expounding Nixon's own involved formulations to the press and thus, by indirection, to the public.

Kissinger's style have guessed that almost overnight he would become Washington's most celebrated exegete? An elaborately anonymous one, to be sure, but all the more effective because of that. There is little in *American Foreign Policy* or other Kissinger books to suggest this potential, but then his new success is not based on the clarity and precision of his private briefings, but, consciously or not, on almost the reverse. His natural style is marvelously, if momentarily, suited to the ambiguities of Nixon's Vietnam policies. The result must have surprised the President as much as it has the rest of Washington. And it has altered the arrangement that was contemplated when Kissinger was first appointed last December.

The original offer was for the scholar to play a self-effacing role as a behind-the-scenes adviser, with the new Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, a lawyer and talented advocate, acting as the front man on foreign policy. This entirely suited Kissinger, it is said, because he neither desired nor intended to deal with the press, but that is not the way it worked out. Rogers was handicapped by inexperience and the heavy burden of getting the State Department reorganized. Kissinger, on the other hand, was on top of the situation from the beginning. He brought to the White House not only his own professionalism, but a large hand-picked staff of assistants who are specialists in almost every field of foreign policy. The Kissinger operation was already functioning before the inauguration. It was inevitable that the President would rely on it during those first months in office when State was still being reorganized.

There were pressing publicity problems from the beginning, notably Vietnam, which called for expert exposition, and the responsibility automatically fell on Kissinger. He was there in the White House; he saw the President constantly; he knew better than anybody else what Nixon was thinking; he had an authoritative but not too explicit way of stating things that Nixon admired; he was respected by the top politicians and members of the press who need and expect regular off-the-record background briefings on the real aims of the Administration. So, almost accidentally, Kissinger began to assume this delicate, highly sensitive responsibility. In foreign policy today, it is not what the President says that counts so much as what Kissinger (at the direction of his Patron, of course) says he meant.

Under the rules of the game, Kissinger cannot be personally quoted, nor can anything be attributed to him. The synonym for him and his operation is "White House sources" or some variation of that. This anonymity has unique advantages. Since Kissinger can't be quoted, his normal style is an advantage instead of a handicap, for his studied opacities and obliquities, his discursive rather than precise musings, his guarded adumbrations of things to come, put the burden of public interpretation on the press. Many of the leading diplomatic correspondents, as well as influential columnists and other opinion-makers, seem to enjoy this experience. They find it stimulating to try to penetrate the somewhat Delphic hints of the agreeable professor.

Kissinger's role and his extraordinary value to the President can be illustrated by his private exposition of President Nixon's famous Vietnam television speech on the night of May 14. To the ordinary citizen listening without benefit of briefing by "White House sources," most of it seemed like the mixture as before. In spite of this, Nixon got good mileage out of the speech after Kissinger gave the press a privately conducted tour of it. The ensuing interpretation prompted two prominent Senatorial doves, Frank Church and Albert Gore, to applaud "the President's initiative," whereas on the opposing side there were no complaints from hawks like Senators Goldwater and Dirksen. There was a similar dual reaction (also helpful to Nixon) among some of the leading and most sophisticated Washington correspondents, all of whom have regular access to the White House.

In the Washington *Post*, Chalmers Roberts, who has a good ear for nuances, was as impressed with what Nixon did *not* say as with what he did say. He concluded that the President had retreated from his resistance to coalition government, and was no longer necessarily wedded to President Thieu. When "all these components, some fully clear, some still shadowy, are added together," he said, "they represent an immense change from past American policy . . . one is struck by how far the Nixon Administration has moved." Conversely, Richard Wilson, a knowledgeable columnist with good Administration" connections, said,

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"Those who have taken the time in measuring Nixon's television speech, along with the explanations of it at the White House and the public reaction to it, tend toward the conclusion that its main emphasis was on not quitting in Vietnam."

Later, James Reston of the *New York Times* got "the clear impression that Mr. Nixon's first priority is to get out of the war, with the agreement of the South Vietnamese if possible, without it if necessary . . . ." Joseph Alsop, on the other hand, thought the President was merely conning the doves. He said, "Nixon's strategy is, of course, a bit like the strategy of the Russian lady in the old story, who threw the wolves a child from time to time in order to keep the wolf pack from catching up with her troika." Alsop and his brother Stewart, a columnist for *Newsweek*, probably see as much of Kissinger, informally as well as formally, as any other journalists in Washington, if not more. Yet Stewart's reading of the Nixon-Kissinger Vietnam scenario indicates he is skeptical about Nixon's pledge never to accept a "disguised defeat" in Vietnam. "For strongly to denounce a disguised defeat," he wrote, "is one way to disguise a defeat."

After yet another White House briefing, it was reported that the withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam is "irreversible," but this didn't inflame the hawks because, as NEA columnist Bruce Biossat wrote, "Nixon intends to retain strong options to be considered in the event Hanoi, at any stage of the withdrawal process, tries to take military advantage of this on a major scale . . . . They include a resumption of heavy bombing, . . . stronger naval support . . . even some blockading."

Besides privately tutoring the VIPs of politics and journalism, Kissinger has taken on the thankless task of seeing and talking with anti-war callers, such as college students and the Quakers. Some time ago, seven young campus leaders, who have vowed to refuse military induction as long as the war in Vietnam continues, went to the White House at the invitation of the President. They talked at length with Kissinger, who pleaded for patience. "He talked about the need for an honorable settlement," said Roger Black, editor of the University of Chicago's *Maroon*, "but we don't believe that a war which started off as a dishonorable one can have an honorable end." Kissinger was quoted as saying to them, "Come back here in a year . . . if nothing has happened, then I can't argue for patience."

This incident later prompted Kissinger to make a revealing statement to Gerald Astor, an editor of *Look*. "I can understand the anguish of the younger generation," he said. "They lack models, they have no heroes, they see no great purpose in the world. But conscientious objection is destructive of a society. The imperatives of the individual are always in conflict with the organization of society. Conscientious objection must be reserved for only the greatest moral issues, and Vietnam is not of this magnitude."

From this, it would seem that Kissinger, far from understanding the "anguish" of the young, was wholly insensitive to it. It would be helpful if he were to enumerate the societies that have been destroyed by conscientious objection. Most troubling of all is his dismissal of the moral issue on the grounds that this must be reserved for wars of greater "magnitude" than Vietnam. More than a million human beings have been killed and wounded in Vietnam; millions more have been made homeless; the country, both north and south, has been wrecked by bombing far exceeding that of World War II. America's own casualties are greater than those of the Korean War. What "magnitude" qualifies as a moral issue?

In spite of his intimacy with the President, Kissinger remains something of an enigma to others in the Administration. They are in awe of his reputation and his standing with the President, and it still isn't clear to them just how Nixon happened to choose for an intimate adviser a man he had never known before. Some also wonder why Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, to say nothing of Governor Nelson Rockefeller, also took him on as a foreign policy consultant. How could one man serve Presidents seemingly so different? Last year when Nixon was campaigning as a Vietnam hawk and Rockefeller was running as a putative dove, Kissinger was the governor's top foreign policy adviser, just as he had been when Rockefeller was openly pursuing a hard line. Later, when Nixon invited him to join his staff, he must have sensed in Kissinger the qualities that also appealed to other Presidents he has advised—the coldness and belief in *Realpolitik* that are reassuring to the White House.

Kissinger has published several books, but he has written singularly little about Vietnam. *American Foreign Policy* was not published until long after the author had gone to Nixon's White House. This small book is really a collection of three essays that were previously published in magazines, and only one of the three is on Vietnam. It was written last September for *Foreign Affairs*, but did not appear until after the announcement of Kissinger's appointment. Hence Nixon had little to go on in studying Kissinger's writings for a clue to his real feelings about Vietnam. In having kept most of his thoughts on the war to himself all these years, Kissinger is almost alone among the nation's prominent students of foreign policy. On his own campus at Harvard, there is hardly a leading professor who has not declared himself. It is still not clear why Kissinger refrained from publishing anything on the subject until after the election last year, and even then his thinking about the war emerged only in a cowled way.

In Washington, *American Foreign Policy* was hailed as "must reading" because it is supposed to be the key to Nixon's war policy. In fact, few of the recommendations in the book have been put into effect and the rhetoric of the Administration flatly contradicts some of them. But the gap between Kissinger's views and Nixon's public policies is instructive. Kissinger's most widely publicized recommendation called for converting the Paris peace talks into "two track" negotiations, with Hanoi and the US negotiating on one track, and South Vietnam and the National Liberation Front on the other, but little is heard of this plan any longer. The minuet in Paris is not much different from what it was in the Johnson days. There is scant negotiation of any kind, but such as there is takes place on any track that is handy. There are hints of secret talks with Hanoi, the NLF, the new Revolutionary Provisional Government, but nobody takes them very seriously.

Kissinger wrote that political collaboration with the enemy, as a practical matter, was out of the question. "It is

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beyond imagination" that parties that have been murdering and betraying each other for twenty-five years could work together as a team giving joint instructions to the entire country." In fact, the latest Washington-Saigon peace proposal is for a so-called joint electoral commission to organize and direct new elections. But as events have shown, this is mostly a ploy to appease US public opinion. When Thieu returned to Saigon from his meeting with Nixon at Midway, his first statement was a warning that anyone advocating coalition was inviting severe punishment.

If negotiations fail, Kissinger felt the US "should adopt a strategy which is plausible because it reduces casualties." After six months in office, however, the Nixon Administration has not reversed Johnson's order to maintain "maximum pressure" on the enemy. Casualties recently fell off, but only because of a lull attributed to the opposition. Kissinger also said "Saigon should broaden its base so that it is stronger for the political contest with the communists." Thieu's answer has been to jail more of his non-communist rivals. In one respect, it should be noted, the Nixon Administration claims to be following a policy that Kissinger has recommended! "We should," he wrote in *American Foreign Policy*, "continue to strengthen the Vietnamese army to permit a gradual withdrawal of some American forces." This, of course, was a policy initiated by Johnson before he left office, and so far the withdrawals have been small ones of no military significance.

If we examine the statements of both Kissinger and Nixon on withdrawal, we find a record so contradictory that it is meaningless, unless it is understood as an ambitious exercise in public relations. Kissinger warned against unilateral withdrawal, which, he wrote, could lead "to an even more dangerous international situation." Yet not long ago a group of Republican senators, after a private briefing by the President himself, reported that Nixon intended to bring back *all* US troops before the 1970 elections. That would be unilateral withdrawal on a scale far exceeding even that proposed by Clark Clifford, the former Secretary of Defense, who suggested the pullback of after an interview with Kissinger, reported in *Newsweek* (June 16 issue) that the President had told Kissinger, in preparing optional plans, to eliminate unrealistic proposals. "In a Vietnam paper, for example," Kissinger told Alsop, "such an essentially silly option as loading the troops on ships and sailing away would not be included." On June 19, however, at a televised press conference, the President said that he hoped to withdraw US troops *faster* than Clark Clifford had suggested. Then, on August 22, Nixon announced bluntly that he was *holding up* further withdrawals. More recently, the anonymous sources have been mentioning the withdrawal of 100,000 troops by Christmas.

Kissinger's book itself has several curious contradictions. At one point, for instance, he remarks that "a mixed commission to develop and supervise a political process to reintegrate the country—including free elections—could be useful." But then, as previously noted, he tells the reader that it is unimaginable that the opposing forces "could work together." His analysis of the war itself also seems inconsistent. He acknowledges in a short preface to the essay on Vietnam, that the conflict is a "civil war which has torn a society for 20 years," but he does not criticize or even question the Johnson-Nixon thesis that US intervention is justified because it is *not* a civil war, but a simple case of external Communist aggression. The impression that Kissinger is indifferent to the moral aspects of the war is reinforced by statements such as: "What is involved now is confidence in American promises." And again: "However we got into Vietnam, whatever the judgment of our actions, ending the war honorably is essential for the peace of the world." Obviously, "honorably" means on terms acceptable to the US. It should now not be too difficult to see why the Joint Chiefs of Staff and four hard-line Presidents found Kissinger an acceptable adviser.

Kissinger's present writ runs far beyond Vietnam, for he is the working manager of the National Security Council, and thus in a position to influence every aspect of foreign and military policy. Yet, for more or less fortuitous reasons, his influence has not been decisive on a number of the big decisions of the new Administration. The ABM program, was suddenly, almost spontaneously, pre-empted by the Secretary of Defense. There is no reason to think that Kissinger fundamentally disagreed with Laird's campaign for ABM, but if it had been left to him the exposition of the policy would have been less clumsy. At another critical moment, when North Korea shot down the EC-121 intelligence plane, it was William P. Rogers, the Secretary of State, rather than Kissinger, who quickly, and decisively, exerted his influence to forestall Presidential retaliation. Again, it appears that this was in line with Kissinger's own thinking, but the initiative was Rogers's.

The impulsive public actions of the Secretaries of State and Defense will always present problems for anyone in Kissinger's position. Before the Administration had time to settle down, for instance, Laird openly threw cold water on the disarmament talks with Russia. He was criticized in the Senate for saying the US would not be ready to sit down with the Soviets before summer or fall, but he turned out to be right. Kissinger's approach would probably have been less blunt, but the issue was seized by Laird before he could get into the act.

It would be a mistake to conclude from this that Kissinger's influence is less than it is reputed to be. The large press corps that followed Nixon around the world saw at first hand how close Kissinger is to the Chief Executive, and how eager he is to have his aide continuously at his side. McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow, who preceded Kissinger in his present position, were key figures in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, but they were not given to the kind of official recognition Kissinger is enjoying. Toward the end of his recent world tour, for example, the President delegated Kissinger to give the President of France and the NATO Permanent Council a private briefing on the results of Nixon's journey. The loftiness of this assignment was matched only by Kissinger's summation of the Nixon odyssey. "I believe," he said, "in this tour we achieved what we set out to do, and from this standpoint we can call it a success . . . ."

What had they set out to do? The Administration's hopes for the limita-

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tion of arms, of peace in the Middle East, even of a settlement in Vietnam, have been based in whole or part on the cooperation and good will of Russia. Did the celebrated visit to Rumania, which so exhilarated Nixon, advance this objective or set it back? Secretary Rogers said that the President's Rumanian visit was "most successful," but added that the US "has no way of knowing whether it affected Soviet thinking." This is puzzling, for almost immediately after the Rumanian trip was announced, the Soviet leaders canceled a scheduled trip to Bucharest to sign a twenty-year pact. Just after Nixon returned, the Russians pointedly sent a second-string delegation to the 10th Congress of the Rumanian Communist Party. Finally, on August 20, they even more pointedly announced that Rumania's celebration of its World War II liberation from the Germans would not be attended, as expected, by any of the ruling troika of Kosygin, Brezhnev, or Podgorny.

Meanwhile, on the Russian end, the disarmament wire has now gone dead, and the Soviets seem to have lost interest in working for either a Middle East or Vietnam settlement. After Nixon left Bucharest, President Ceausescu pledged his country's allegiance to the Warsaw Pact, and hailed the Soviet Union as the savior of mankind. He also criticized American "imperialism" and called for the withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam.

After Nixon left New Delhi, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi revealed that she "felt that the Vietnamese should be left without any outside interference." In the wake of Nixon's visit to Thailand, that country has begun to talk about bringing home the 12,000 troops it put in Vietnam to please the US. "Possibly the only good the Nixon mission has done for the American public," said the *Manchester Guardian*, "is to arouse it to the real peril of a second Vietnam in Thailand."

Wherever the President and Kissinger went, the talk inevitably came back to Vietnam. The essence of the Nixon message: Vietnam will go down in history as "one of America's finest hours," but one such war is enough and there won't be any more. This has puzzled the rest of the world as much as it has the American public. One reason Nixon seems to admire Kissinger so much is that his learned adviser rivals the master himself as a cryptographer. Kissinger, for instance, has written that "the guerrilla wins if he does not lose; the conventional army loses if it does not win." By this definition the US has already lost the war in Vietnam. But he then goes on to say: "The US cannot accept a military defeat or a change in the political structure of South Vietnam brought about by external military force . . . ."

Traveling in Europe just after the end of the Nixon tour, I found every official I talked to had the same question: Does Nixon have a plan to end the war in Vietnam? If so, what is it? To them, the situation seems much the same as it was under Lyndon Johnson. That is, there are still more than 500,000 American troops in Vietnam, the peace talks in Paris are still stalemated, in Saigon an undiluted military government remains in power, the casualties continue to mount, there is talk (but little progress) of bringing the boys home, and the same old propaganda goes on about democratizing the Saigon regime, and turning the fighting back to the South Vietnamese army at some mythical time when it is prepared to cope with the enemy.

Just after Nixon left Saigon, a London *Times* dispatch said: "It seems inconceivable that the Americans have no peace plan; it seems inconceivable that President Nixon, with the megaton mind of Dr. Kissinger at his elbow, would indulge in foolish optimism or whistling in the dark; it seems equally inconceivable that, out of simple bonhomie, President Nixon would go out of his way to visit President Thieu, praise his magnanimity, and then, albeit off the cuff, describe him as one of the four or five best politicians in the world. No American President has such an impulsive cuff. It cannot be anything the Thieu government has already done; it must be something it is going to do." The *Times* then hazarded a guess that Thieu was about to spring the major Cabinet reshuffle that has long been promised as the first step in broadening the government, but that possibility was scotched when Thieu named a close military buddy, General Tran Thien Khiem, as the new Premier.

The Nixon strategy, if it can be called that, is more explicable if it is looked upon as an ambition, rather than a plan. The ambition is to relieve the Administration of the political liability of the war, but without any forthright admission of error or any renunciation of existing commitments in Vietnam and Asia as a whole. And, above all, the Administration wants to protect itself against charges of a "disguised defeat" and "sell out," or of being soft on communism, especially from those who did so much to put Nixon in power. If the recent maneuvering of Nixon, in both word and deed, seems tricky, it is because this kind of operation requires constant improvisation, involved extenuations, fast footwork, and faster public relations.

From the Administration's point of view, the ideal solution would be for Saigon and the National Liberation Front to agree on a peace settlement, which, regardless of the terms, could not be blamed on Nixon. After all, the US has long been committed to accepting even a communist government, so long as it is not "imposed." In Paris, the US negotiators still talk hopefully of progress, but in Washington very few officials, including Nixon and Kissinger, are counting on it any longer. For Hanoi and the NLF, anything less than a transitional coalition government would be tantamount to surrender; for President Thieu and his fellow generals, a coalition government would doubtless be political suicide.

Does the US have the power and/or the will to force a settlement on the opposing sides? We have already abandoned a military victory, and have stopped bombing North Vietnam; the enemy's casualties are down, and he can hope for further relief through the pressure of US public opinion to bring the troops home. Why should he budge?

As for Saigon, the generals are well aware that they must make some surface concessions in order to help Nixon appease US public opinion. They can afford, for example, to go through the motions of agreeing to a mixed electoral commission to conduct new elections, for they would still be in effective control of the government, and anyway there is no chance of the enemy agreeing to such a mechanism as long as Thieu is in power. Thieu is also willing to humor Nixon by reshuffling his Cabinet, but he is not about to free the imprisoned Truong Dinh Dzu, the non-Communist peace candidate who ran so well in the last election, and bring him into the government. Since his Midway meeting

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with Nixon. Thieu has been making it more and more plain that he has gone about as far as he will go, which means that serious peace talks are not in the cards.

Once US military escalation and immediate peace negotiations are ruled out as practical possibilities, Nixon's options are swiftly narrowed. They come down to the following: (1) force (or try to force) Thieu to come to terms with the enemy whether he wants to or not; (2) failing that, withdraw support of Thieu, and allow a new government to come to power that would be willing to negotiate seriously a settlement with the NLF and the withdrawal of US troops; (3) unilaterally withdraw all US troops and turn the war back to South Vietnam, leaving it up to the Saigon government to negotiate a peace or continue fighting on its own; (4) continue the present policy of stalemate war and stalemate peace talks, hoping the enemy will eventually collapse or capitulate.

Since the first three options would trigger "sell-out" charges against Nixon, they can be dismissed. He is not the sort of leader who will risk being vulnerable to charges of "softness"; and he has shown neither the inclination nor the courage to present a serious policy of withdrawal to the public. Thus the Administration has chosen the fourth option, essentially the old LBJ formula, but with a new façade to make it more popular. It is apparent that Nixon thinks Johnson's chief failure was not in the policy, but in his inability to package it successfully for public consumption.

It must be conceded that Nixon and Kissinger have been more adroit in that respect. They have kept up a hot-and-cold running rhetoric, which, combined with token troop withdrawals, has so far kept the public, the politicians, and the press off balance. The game seems to be to announce the withdrawal of enough troops to lull war resistance in the US, but not in fact withdraw so many as to jeopardize the South Vietnamese army or government, or the US foothold in Southeast Asia. Thousands of troops may or may not come home; the draft may or may not be eased; but heavy bombing will continue. As can be seen, the Administration intends to play this by ear. Also it balances its policies by timely reassurances, such as, on the one hand, "no Asians," and, on the other, the US "honors its commitments" and "we won't bug out." All this requires virtual day-to-day orchestration, but so far Nixon and Kissinger have done it almost with zest.

It is, in fact, such an ad hoc operation that not even the Secretaries of State and Defense can always keep up with it. Secretary Rogers held a press conference in Washington on August 20 while the President and Kissinger were in San Clemente, at which he said the Administration would go on withdrawing troops whether the fighting lull in Vietnam continued or not. The next day in Washington, Secretary Laird went further. The Administration, he said, was even considering cutting the US force in Vietnam in half, if need be, to "quiet dissent" should the peace talks make no progress. Both Rogers and Laird were embarrassed when the President, less than forty-eight hours later, announced in California that further troop withdrawals would be deferred.

Nixon is playing for the breaks, and it is not inconceivable that he could get them. Hanoi and the NLF may weaken in the field, or temporize at Paris. Ho Chi Minh compromised at Geneva in 1954. Russia or China, or both, may tire of the war, and press Hanoi toward a settlement. That also happened before—at the climax of the Indo-China war. Peace groups might somehow come to power in South Vietnam (although this is extremely unlikely in view of US policy) and negotiate a settlement. The breaks, however, are much more likely to go the other way if Nixon tries to maintain the present strategy over several years.

No matter how cleverly he and Kissinger publicize their moves, they may not be able to keep anti-war sentiment from exploding. The South Vietnamese army (ARVN) is more likely to deteriorate than to improve. There could be another series of Saigon military coups, like the ones that brought Thieu and General Ky to power, with the military situation becoming even worse as a result. The North Vietnamese might overrun Laos; Thailand might call for help. The tense situation in Korea could suddenly confront the US with another military "commitment" that has to be "honored." When President Chung Hee Park of South Korea visited Nixon in California in late August, the US President said, America "will be proud to stand with you and your people in the future."

The Administration's claims of changing Johnson's policy have not been lost on the Senate. The senior senator from Tennessee, Albert Gore, recently put this question to Secretary Laird: "Has there been any change in the objectives of our country in Vietnam by the present Administration?" Laird said, "Yes, I believe there are certain changes."

Gore: In objectives?

Laird: Basic changes . . . but I want to make it clear that as far as overall objective is concerned that has not been escalated. . . ."

Gore: I did not ask if the objective had been escalated. I am going to show you a top secret document with a marked sentence which I will ask you to look at and then I will ask you again if there has been a change in objectives . . . . I have an arrow pointed to the sentence there . . . . Have there been changes in the objectives of the US government in South Vietnam?

Laird: No.

Objectives, no; publicity, yes. Cairo's leading editor, referring to the "degradation" of politics in the United States, remarked that "the concern of an American President is no longer to move, but to seem to be moving." He was writing about the Middle East, but he found a parallel in Nixon's Vietnam policy, which he characterized as one of "embellishment—the creation of an illusion of accomplishment."

Kissinger has at times successfully parried efforts by the press to probe into Administration policy by noting that high officials cannot always be responsive, and that on occasion some things must be taken on faith. "It's difficult to convince the opposition in this country that you're doing something," Kissinger told Gerald Astor. "Critics, perfectly legitimately, raise questions. But we're in the difficult position of not being able to answer. This job makes you doubt the amount that any outsider can know of what's happening." Kissinger seems to be blissfully unaware of it, but he is

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already suffering from an illusion endemic to the White House, especially among newcomers, including new Presidents. This is the illusion that "inside" information somehow confers omniscience on those privy to it. Acting on super-secret CIA advice, John F. Kennedy made one of the worst mistakes of his career, the Bay of Pigs invasion. Lyndon Johnson, encouraged by the secret information of the Joint Chiefs, thought North Vietnam would be a pushover. In their dealings with "outsiders," it is only human for high officials to think, if not to say, "if you only knew what I know."

How much the better it would be if, once in a while, they knew what the public sometimes instinctively knows—without benefit of inside information. That, for instance, the government's Vietnam policy is a disaster. □